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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000476

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [LT](#)  
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: CHARGE MEETS WITH OPPOSITION, GOL ON CALL FOR AID  
SUSPENSION

REF: MASERU 460 AND PREVIOUS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Charge d'Affaires a.i. W. Patrick Murphy, CDA  
a.i., EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Charge met on August 7 with Lesotho's main opposition party leaders, and separately on August 8 with a key GOL minister, to discuss the opposition's recent appeal for a suspension of foreign assistance, including MCC funding, until the country returns to "proper democratic rule." The opposition leaders, describing their meeting with Charge as "therapy," restated their major complaints about the current government and their concern that MCC funds would be squandered. During Charge's meeting with Minister of Natural Resources Moleleki, the minister engaged in a blistering attack on the opposition while acknowledging that the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) had likely tortured opposition detainees. Moleleki conceded that Lesotho risks damaging its relations with the international community if it ignores allegations of human rights abuses. While foreign assistance has served as a convenient focus point in the latest set of salvos between the GOL and opposition parties, there has been no fundamental change in the country's unresolved political stalemate. END SUMMARY.

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Opposition Asks for MCC Suspension  
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12. (U) On July 19, four days prior to a signing ceremony in Washington for a Millennium Challenge Account Compact for Lesotho, Embassy Maseru received a letter from the country's five primary opposition parties requesting that the MCC "halt the award to Lesotho in order to assist the current efforts of building political dialogue between the ruling party and opposition parties." The letter cited alleged human rights abuses by the GOL, an attack on the residence of ABC leader Thomas Thabane, and negative developments on governance issues in the Mountain Kingdom. Similar letters were sent to other donors (UN, EU, Irish) demanding a generalized suspension of foreign assistance. The Charge responded to the signatories of the letter inviting them to discuss the matter in person. Opposition leaders released their letters to the media, and Lesotho's most read newspaper, Public Eye, carried a front page story on the issue on August 3.

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Opposition "Therapy" At Embassy Maseru  
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13. (C) On August 7, Charge and Poloff (notetaker) met ABC Leader Thabane, Basotho National Party (BNP) Leader Major General Lekhanya, Alliance of Congress Parties (ACP) Deputy Leader Dr.

Ralitopole, Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) Leader Malebo, and the son of nonagenarian rump National Independent Party (NIP) Leader Manyeli. Thabane stated that the opposition was pleased with the U.S. commitment to aid Lesotho and with the scale of the MCC compact. He stated, however, that a "temporary suspension" of foreign assistance was necessary because "if the aid flow came in without us first cleaning house, it may cause even more problems." Thabane, a former GOL minister, expounded upon a litany of complaints against the GOL, including the alleged disappearance of several ABC party members, the Lesotho Defense Forces' (LDF's) use of torture, the GOL's lack of fiscal accountability, a deterioration of press freedom, an attempted assassination against him, and the politicization of food aid. He concluded by saying that the U.S. Government should address these issues by delaying MCC funding.

¶4. (C) MFP Leader Malebo said he was "appalled by the way this country handles its finances." Stating that Lesotho's executive branch is "running like a wild bull," he spoke disparagingly of Prime Minister Mosisili's congratulations to the LDF on a "job well done" (in recovering stolen military weapons) after his return from Washington, despite allegations of torture. The BNP's Major General Lekhanya seconded many of these sentiments, stating that "aid goes to the greedy, not the needy." In summation, ACP Deputy Leader Dr. Ralitopole stated that democracy returned to Lesotho after years of military dictatorship due to outside pressure, and that more outside pressure is needed to get Lesotho back on the right track. She remarked that the primary value of the session with the Charge was simply as "therapy" for opposition leaders to vent their frustrations.

¶5. (C) Charge thanked the political leaders for expressing their concerns, and reiterated the need for GOL-opposition dialogue on these issues. He emphasized that as parliamentarians, the opposition had a role in insuring the effectiveness of MCC spending in Lesotho. Indeed, the Compact itself was the result of proposals and consultations generated by stakeholders inside Lesotho, including political leaders and civil society representatives. Charge discussed the mutual interests which the United States and Lesotho share in ensuring that implementation begins on schedule, and shared a list of MCC

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safeguards to ensure fairness and transparency built into the procurement and financial regulations. The Charge also discussed how human rights issues are ingrained in the MCC eligibility criteria, which countries must meet annually even after compact signing, through the organization's 16 indicators. Charge also noted, however, that the strategy to encourage the international community to deny Lesotho foreign assistance was a disservice to the humanitarian and development needs of the Basotho people. Charge added that a healthy, productive, democratic, and peaceful Lesotho was in the national interests of the U.S., and that U.S. assistance was designed to help the country reach these objectives.

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The Colorful Minister Moleleki  
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¶6. (C) On August 8, Charge and Poloff met with Minister of Natural Resources Moleleki to discuss the opposition's demand for the suspension of foreign assistance, including MCC funding. After congratulating Minister Moleleki for the Prime Minister's visit to Washington for the compact signing (an event which Moleleki said "surpassed his wildest expectations"), Charge noted that although major donors were not giving serious consideration to opposition demands to suspend foreign assistance, the political parties had raised a variety of concerns regarding process and human rights that the GOL should address. Moleleki launched into a lengthy excoriation of Lesotho's political opposition, stating that the current political crisis was initiated solely by the opposition, who have "bloody hands" from their work with previous dictatorial regimes. In line with his personal style, the Minister made a

number of tabloid-esque accusations of varied reliability aimed at his perceived opponents (i.e., that Lesotho's Commissioner of Police is engaged in a sexual relationship with ABC Leader Thabane and that BNP Leader Lekhanya murdered a young man while leading Lesotho's military government in the 1980's).

¶7. (C) Notably, Minister Moleleki acknowledged the LDF's possible use of torture, stating, "We are aware that the military tortured people, but how else could they get back their weapons?" Moleleki stated that Lesotho's political opposition leaders were directly responsible for attacks on ministerial residences, and that "the conspiracy has permeated the judiciary." He stated that the LDF is not fully under the civilian control of the GOL, and accused the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) of unprofessional conduct and being "politically unwilling" to find the perpetrators of recent attacks. (Note: Interestingly, ABC leader Thabane complained to Charge that the opposition believes the defense forces are "too supportive of the LCD government." End Note.) Charge advised Minister Moleleki that the GOL, like any government, should acknowledge widespread allegations of human rights abuses and support the full application of the rule of law and transparent investigations to determine their veracity. Moleleki conceded that the GOL should not "sweep such allegations under the rug" and risks damaging relations with the international community by doing so.

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Entrenchment and Stalemate  
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¶8. (C) COMMENT: Despite Maseru's status as a small town in which members of the political and business elite are well known to each other, dialogue between the GOL and Lesotho's opposition remains elusive. The meetings of August 7-8 demonstrated that each side remains entrenched. It is unlikely that the opposition has any expectation that donors will respond affirmatively to their strategic appeal to halt aid, but the opposition demonstrates a willingness to use virtually any means possible to achieve a stronger foothold in parliament and undermine the LCD government ("We won't use force, however," insisted the ABC's Thabane). Minister Moleleki's candid recognition that the LDF employed torture, and his sentiment that it was justified, is troubling. While foreign assistance has served as a convenient focus point in the latest set of salvos between the GOL and opposition parties, there has been no fundamental change in Lesotho's ongoing political stalemate.  
END COMMENT.  
MURPHY